THE GOOD LIFE RECONSIDERED
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This year marks ARCADE’s 30th Anniversary. Over the next few months, as a gift to our community, we plan to re-frame our business model, strengthen our unique programs, create a blog and other means of two-way communication, and determine how to best serve the design community all the while producing our award-winning magazine. ARCADE. A lot of good things are around the corner, so stay tuned.

Want to support ARCADE? Please contact Amanda Bakke at 206 971 5596 or amanda@arcadejournal.com.
In 2010, over two-thirds of the US population saw at least one movie in the theatres. That’s over 222.7 million people – a number greater than attendance at theme parks and sporting events combined – and for many Americans, attending a highly-anticipated “movie of the summer” is an entertaining (and rather inexpensive) seasonal activity.

Because a flick’s success is most loudly evaluated on its revenue and ratings, this infographic illustrates a film’s true achievement by relating that important data. How have the past three summers’ blockbusters stacked up against each other? The graph below shows all US films released in May through August of 2008, 2009 and 2010 that made above $1 million in revenue at the end of their respective year.

**Moviegoer Demographics**
- Infrequent (once a month)
- Frequent (over once a month)
- Non-moviegoers

*From Rotten Tomatoes’ Top Critics:
1. “This is a rich, complex, visually thrilling piece of pop entertainment, as strong in any superhero epic and as thought-provoking as the best of them.”
2. “It’s a great movie of the summer. Awesome, and everybody sees it.”
3. “It’s a piece of junk. I loved the first two, but these are movies that are completely connected to the clique in a way.”
4. “Every now and then, a film comes along that both defies and compels description.”"
As architects, we like to think of buildings as essentially stable—even completely renewed, we expect them to remain unchanged works of art. Yet I was surprised recently by a comment from one of my students just how often buildings are changed.

I was teaching students in my “Seattles Architecture” class on a walking tour in Pioneer Square and the lower part of downtown, when one of the students remarked, “It’s a historic district, so I thought all the buildings would be like they were originally, but almost, instead, they have been adapted many times.”

The student was right, of course. Making Pioneer Square a historic district in 1970 preserved the buildings from demolition; however, most of these buildings reveal an evolution over the previous 80 years, and many show alterations during the past 40 years, when they have been adaptively reused.

For example, one is the two-time building at the southeast corner of S. Jackson Street and Occidental Avenue S., the building now known as the Washington Shoe Building. The brick of the lower four floors is orange red, while the upper two floors are maroon. The combination seems unusual—why would anyone make such an odd choice?

In fact, it wasn’t always this way. Before the corner was cleaned in 2002, the building appeared monochromatic. Only with the cleaning did the color difference appear. This explosion is found in its history.

The original building was a project of John M. Frank, who, by the early 1880s, was a partner in the firm of Blackwell & Baker. Fortuitously located, the building was expanded in 1883, and the architect was with the firm, Howard & Smith, which had previously been involved in the construction of buildings in the Pioneer Square Historic District. The interior was completely upgraded with new systems as well as stain glass designed by structural engineer Coghillon Porter Ladd. In fact, Ron Wright & Associates to update the building, with parking in the basement, retail uses on the first floor and office tenants above, while retaining the exterior in accordance to the guidelines of the Pioneer Square Historic District. The interior was completed in 1994 and still serves as headquarters for the Samis Land Company, as well as a number of other businesses.

The building’s architect, Frank Gehry, designed Walt Disney Concert Hall (completed in 2003) for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The building was named after automobile manufacturer Frank D. Gehry is a filmmaker, lecturer, culture critic and associate professor of architecture.

In a recent essay about the opening of the New World Center in Miami Beach, New York music critic Alex Ross points out that when the building’s architect, Frank Gehry, designed Walt Disney Concert Hall (completed in 2003) for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, “His aim was to present the orchestra as a vibrant organism, not as a desiccated form trapped within a fortress of culture.”

The core of the structure was the Washington Shoe Company—they would remain as tenants for eight decades. The company name was painted on the north and west facades, above the third-floor windows, and the building came to be called the Washington Shoe Building. It retained the same even after it was acquired by Sam Israel in the mid-1940s.

For those who recall that they had just finished securing the building, the building’s architect, Frank Gehry, designed Walt Disney Concert Hall (completed in 2003) for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The performance was not so much a collaboration among the living, but more like a séance, the living about this dead person in the music, in the past. Though boxy and not as flamboyant as the other Gehry buildings, the Disney Hall is an institution. It’s the spectacle of new technologies compensating for old technologies used in the production of its music. Jazz has been dying since the late 1960s, when it was first replaced by younger and less technically demanding forms of music. At the peak of modern jazz, no work of architecture was devoted to it, facilitating in growth or reconfiguration. Indeed, this is what happened to jazz at New York’s Lincoln Center. The completion of the Rafael Vidich-designed Frederick P. Rose Hall in 2001 marked the final elimination of the art, which also uses old technologies in the production of its music. Jazz has been dying since the late 1960s, when it was first replaced by younger and less technically demanding forms of music.

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NEIGHBORHOODS THAT FIRE ON ALL CYLINDERS

A CONVERSATION WITH LIZ DUNN

Recently, BUILD LLC sat down with visionary developer Liz Dunn for an interview regarding her philosophy regarding the evolution of neighborhoods.

The work you’re doing at your development company Dunn + Hobbes fosters “urban villages” and currently focuses on infill projects and reusing old buildings along Seattle’s Pike-Pine corridor. You’ve created some wonderful places in town, including 1310 E. Union, The Piston & Ring Building, the sleek Agnes Lofts and the recently completed Melrose Market. Tell us a bit about how this focus came about.

I started with one piece of land that no one else seemed to want. It was 3,200 square feet—smaller than most single family lots in Seattle but zoned for six stories. I love skinny lots because they’re such an interesting urban challenge—and the completed projects can have such great visual impact. The development we were seeing in Seattle at the time wasn’t particularly inspiring, and skinny urban buildings can inject so much life into their blocks.

It was difficult to get the process going; that first project, 1310 E. Union, was an exercise in bootstrapping—pooling some equity with friends and miraculously finding a lender. I teamed up with Dave Miller [Miller Hull Partnership] on the project, and neither of us had ever done an urban mixed-use project before. But that was probably a blessing because we weren’t hampered by pre-conceptions.

Development work is a treacherous business—what can be built all-too-often depends not on good intentions or talent but on the financial market and the banking system’s willingness to lend. How are you keeping such a consistent level of quality in your projects?

Building trust with lenders is an incremental thing. The process needs to go smoothly, everyone needs to get paid and the finished projects need to be good. And I think banks appreciate the positive press that comes with innovative projects that the community seems to appreciate. After 1310, the next time around, the same bank loaned money on a much larger assembly of properties and supported me in incrementally tackling the slices one by one—improving buildings and filling in urban voids. I guess I’ve had good luck finding lenders who believe in the long-term value of these urban neighborhoods and who understand that good urban infill isn’t a cookie-cutter product.

You’re speaking our language. Do you think it’s possible for a developer to be intimately involved in a project and still be profitable at the same time?

Partly, it’s a question of time frame. Traditional developers and institutional investors want a pro forma that shows an easy 5–10 year payback and often try to flip a project as soon as it’s finished. If you design and build a project in the right location that you believe in yourself—as you know it’s durable and long-term appeal—and you can afford to hang on to it, the bigger profit will come later. I would also say that for long-term design appeal, you’re better off with a small site than a large one. For the people that are willing to pay, you can make it work.

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big one. Every neighborhood has a scale, and it’s really hard to make a crisp, enduring statement on an extra-small site, where the same elements have to be repeated too many times—which is why those projects look like crowded-sardine boxes from day one. Some banks and investors are finally coming around to this way of thinking—though it would be nice if some investors would set up a bank for people who do great adaptive reuse and nice skinny infill and an equity fund to repeat this a few times within a neighborhood, so that the benefits of the project can play off each other.

Your misadventures about attracting more people to live and work in urban neighborhoods is inspiring, and it seems to be working quite well. How do you measure your progress and success so far?

One way I track progress or success is by the presence of other damage in a neighborhood that aren’t my projects but whose were encouraged by my work or the planning we’ve put into place in those areas. The slow, incremental layering and evolution of a neighborhood is an important indicator of progress to me; the smithy mix of adaptive reuse combined with modern infill that allows for a lot of local business opportunity—people milling around on the sidewalk day and evening, enough of them to support even more local businesses and great places to hang out. It’s a utopian circle until one day you know you’ve been too successful and the out-of-neighborhood developers with their big, too-big projects turn up! It’s tricky.

One of the benefits of your work is more people walk around the Pike-Pine corridor rather than drive. Does it doff the purpose when you create a neighborhood real estate developers have their fail, too-big projects turn up?

You’re involved with the Preservation Green Lab; what are the current highlights of that group? I’d say it’s a policy-oriented, kind of think-tank that I started up for the National Trust for historic preservation. Rather than preservation in the traditional sense, the goal is to make the case that all of our old buildings are part of shaping urban environments and give them an identity in sustainable urbanism. Many of those older buildings were built in a time more study and adaptable way than contemporary buildings.

And people love them—tenants, customers, visitors. We’re just trying to keep old buildings—not as historic structures but as buildings that are interesting and useful and constantly being adapted. As someone who’s in the trenches of urban issues, do you have solutions to better bring an integration of old and new to the United States? I think you need to get out of the hands of the type of preservationists who are only considering the history of a building, not its future. The conversation needs to include adaption and reuse. The Pike-Pine corridor provides a good example of a new polcy to reuse buildings while not making them so

Precisely what they’re unmalleable. We need a smaller grain model for the preservation of ordinary buildings here in the United States. We’re not big fans of the term “green” what’s your take on it? Oh, dear. I’m probably going to get myself in trouble for saying this because I work on a few “green building” policy issues, but my personal definition of sustainability pays a lot more focus on neighborhoods of buildings, physical connections, social and economic opportunity, your vision for sustainability. To me, sustainability means neighborhoods that fire on all cylinders. I don’t mean to pick on green building, but when areas are too focused on green building technology and don’t see the forest for the trees, so to speak.

We couldn’t agree more. What are some new strategies that you’re applying to design and development? I’m interested in new kinds of conservation models for neighborhoods that aren’t about bottling up the past but adapting into the future, helping this pencil-out for owners of older buildings by making adaptive reuse more flexible from a code perspective, and promoting policies that encourage public infrastructure investments for things like district heating systems in older neighborhoods. And policies for letting development capacity get moved around within a neighborhood

so that rising buildings don’t come with a penalty. In the Pike-Pine corridor, you now get a density bonus if you build on top of an existing building, rather than demolishing it, and we want to create a program that makes it possible to sell unused air rights. Again, if we can focus more on creatively reuse buildings, and offering incentives to do so, that’s a good thing.

Are you a fan of the urban planer/adobe/here of ours, Jane Jacobs? I know it’s a cliché, but I’m a huge fan of Jane Jacobs. She’s still the smartest urban design person ever, even though she’s not with us anymore. You’re probably familiar with the website called milkcorn.com, which ranks the walkability of neighborhoods. We’ve talked about how they should come out with a version that adds in all the Jane Jacobs’ concepts about urbanism and density and local businesses, and they could call it Jane Score. They’ve promised me that they will get right on it.

What advice do you have for the next generation of architects coming up the ranks? The next generation of architects is going to have to embrace the idea that there is glory in adaptive reuse. Architecture schools still set unrealistic expectations for young architects—namely, that success as professionals is about creating new spaces, whereas I think the role of the architect is becoming more about adding a thoughtful new layer of design to something that someone else has created. The profession is becoming more about conservation and urban infill. There is pride and reality in that, and some architects are embracing the change more quickly than others.

How are the roles at Dunn + Hobbes divided between you and your business partner? Well, my original partner was my dog, Hobbes, and he hasn’t been with us for a while.

That’s not the answer we were expecting. Sorry to hear about your dog. In the early days, before I had a real office, Hobbes would be the reason I would get out of my pajamas—so he would be taken out for walks. So to answer your question about roles, I guess he scheduled my meetings.

What are you currently working on? At the moment, in addition to being Director of the Preservation Green Lab, I’m leading urban policy in the Citis program at the London School of Economics. What’s it like getting assigned homework after you’ve basically solved an entire neighborhood’s problems?

It’s funny and still works, especially group projects. I mean, my group is great, but when you were in school and you had to work in a group, you know you were never going to agree. But it’s still like that. But the nice difference this time around is that I’m super-involved in the context.

In the United States, we don’t think about cities in terms of sustainability and climate action goals. She is also the founder and principal of Dunn + Hobbes LLC, a Seattle-based design-build firm in Seattle run by Kevin Eckert and Andrew van Piston & Ring Building, Seattle, Washington

BuIlld llc


Melrose Market

BUITLD is an industrial design/build firm in Seattle run by Kevin Eckert and Andrew van Piston & Ring Building, Seattle, Washington.

Is there anything we didn’t ask that you’d like to cover? It’s important to make clear that I am both pro-density and pro-building-reuse—I think we can do both successfully within the same neighborhoods. But policymakers seem to focus on making the most dense places even more dense—when suburban also needs density. So let’s spread the love.
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If we are going to design a sustainable way of living, we need to take “the good life” more seriously. We don’t need raw hedonism – waiter, more champagne! – or monkish asceticism, but instead, something in between. The good life must be broad enough to span from the battered, Depression-born “American Dream” to Aristotle’s thesis that happiness, our most important drive, can be satisfied by living well and doing good. When it comes to achieving a more climate-sensitive way of living, advocates of sustainable urbanism have left out recommending we wear hair shirts, yet urban planners, among others, still find themselves telling people to “eat their oatmeal”—i.e., “accept having fewer, but hopefully greener, lifestyle choices, because it’s good for you.” I’ve always hated oatmeal, I’ve never liked being told what to eat and I’m not alone in these sentiments.

For this issue of ARCADE, we challenged a range of designers, thinkers and activists to respond to this proposal: To get to the sustainable future we want, we have to stop and remember that our goal can’t just be to live green, it also has to be to live well. Some responded with clarifying questions; others offered strong alternative visions for what a good life is. These perspectives include deliberately minimalist living that looks, in part, to 14th century Japan; a future that includes “biophilic” habitation, even in urban neighborhoods, and an existence in which family and community trump “lifestyle.” Most of the examples are concrete: sharing a garden, riding the bus, cleaning up a run, going to the coffee house at the corner or helping a neighborhood to rebuild.

With that said, we roundly challenged this issue’s premise early on: What’s the point of the good life to the millions, and globally, billions, who have such limited choices? Point taken—yet there are still better or worse choices many of us can make, and sustainable alternatives for basic needs will only be made if we offer satisfaction — make cultural sense — in the here and now, as well as for future generations. (For example, see reports on the work developing biochar stoves in Latin America at SeaChar.org.) And for the US middle class, the next American dream can’t just be that we should be happy with less — eat your oatmeal — but rather, look to be about expanding opportunity.

Design is a way of thinking, and it has an extraordinarily powerful ability to shape the way we live, and in particular, the way we choose to live. The Northwest has been on the cutting edge of redefining daily life for decades. It can come from grassroots organizing, enlightened government policy, and it can come from corporations, whether for love or money. Microsoft, Starbucks, Amazon, Costco and Nike are all adept at finding new ways of defining living well. Corporations have a range of motivations, and their actions produce a range of unintended consequences (do we really benefit from fewer bookstores?). Nonetheless, these are fundamentally transformative ways of producing and consuming, and they are at the scale of change we talk about when we discuss a new urbanism that can last through this century and into the next.

As this feature shows, the Northwest continues to be a place for ideas and actions that can change the way we live. Sustainability advocates know that they have to present a future that is desired and chosen, not mandated and enforced. If we are open to it, design can harness the power of aspiration and choice, leading to diverse new ways of thinking, whether from the corporate suite or down the street. We can design a smart, green life, but it needs to have rewards. Whether it’s 7 or 70, rich or poor, to keep building a sustainable system to address health, equity and climate change, our lives need to be good.
With Ray’s statement on “the good life” as background to our interview, we asked two local residents their views on the topic. Jessica Geenen works for Puget Sound Energy as a program manager for the Energy Efficient Communities program. Jenny Kam is a freelance designer whose master’s thesis in industrial design centered on the topic of hedonism. We asked Jessica and Jenny an identical set of questions. The following piece reveals facets of the same topic from two independent points of view.

Two Perspectives on the Good Life

Interview by August de los Reyes & David McCollum

Do we have to make people “eat their oatmeal”?—do what is good for both the individual and the whole?

JG—Yes, I do think we have to make people “eat their oatmeal” because of our shared reliance on other people and the environment we inhabit. Our society has evolved into thinking that we and those in our immediate social or familial circle are most important and deserve the bulk of our attention. However, everything we do has an impact on others, from the factory workers who make our clothes in a way that allows for their cheap prices to the developing world river ecosystems that are poisoned with heavy metals from our disposed electronic gadgets. In the more affluent US, we are faced in the “watermarked” associated with our everyday decisions and so are unable to see the effects we have on others. The word “community” comes from the Latin roots comm, meaning “together” and munus, meaning “responsibility.”

JK—Yes. At the very least, “eating our oatmeal” contrasts how pleasurable everything can be, but more importantly, our future wellbeing depends on it. We all know this “oatmeal” is good for us, but resistance persists because the hard part isn’t eating it, it’s learning not to resent having to do so. Some of this indignation stems from not seeing the larger picture that “oatmeal” is beneficial for everyone, not just the eater. When this becomes evident, coercion can be removed because there will be understanding that the payroll is bigger than the piece.

What role does pleasure play?

JG—I think pleasure plays a key role in how we define the good life as more recent generations have been brought from a young age that it is OK to completely indulge. No longer is cardio food something we only get at the fair once a year—it’s available on street corners and in airports. Shopping has become something we can do any time, day or night, online on our couch or while on our smart phones. The good life has been defined as the ability to engage in pleasurable activities whenever we want; immediate gratification has become the modus operandi of our society. The good life is crafted from the satisfaction that results from establishing balance in your experiences. It’s about recognizing your need to unwind on the couch in a warm cocoon of blanket-y goodness. It’s about pleasure.

JK—On the surface, it would seem that pleasure is simply the antithesis of “oatmeal,” but in fact, it is the sugar that washes this medicine down and the only reason we continue to put up with anything unpleasant. It is a catalyst for participation, as well as a buffer against the mundane. Its presence in every stage of every experience allows us to unwind, relax and enjoy it. In sustaining the good life, as with most other things, pleasure can be most effectively employed when enjoyed in moderation and in multiple varieties. Even in small and idiosyncratic pleasures, pleasure is tied with meaning and value, connected to a rewarding life and should never be left out of any endeavor. In essence, pleasure is everything.

What role should government, business and other institutions play?

JG—I think they play a critical role in ensuring the good life. On the one hand, they can impose rules on society that protect people from risks they cannot see or cannot control. It’s within the government’s power to force these decisions. For example, the UK retailer Marks and Spencer, through their Plan A initiative, has been working to eliminate unexamined, unethical products from its shelves. Or, conversely, companies can continue to manufacture their products in ways that improve negative externalities of pollution and decreased social conditions on those usually the poor and marginalized—who are now the only ones able to afford products in ways that impose negative externalities of pollution and decreased social conditions on those usually the poor and marginalized—who do not have the option to avoid them, nor the means nor voice to speak out.

Businesses and governments can make these decisions, but as consumers we also have to “eat our oatmeal” and start paying the true cost of the items we purchase and the services we use. This is part of the shared responsibility we must have in our world community.

JK—Because government and large institutions are so prominent, they have the obligation to create an environment in which we can readily operate responsibly. Regulating without seeming like an overbearing obstruction altogether, but that’s only half of the equation. Our attention should also be devoted to studying emerging objects and ideas, not only looking at why something died but why it survived or existed in the course of history.
We’re the government. We’re here to help you lead “the good life.” To guide your hand, reduce your footprint, cut out your cigarettes, kill your car, shrink your footprint. We are either the taxpayers’ collective desire to stem earth-killing excess or the Super Civic or both. We’re here to help you. We’re the government. We’re either the taxpayers’ collective desire to stem earth-killing excess or the Super Civic or both. We’re here to help you. We’re the government. We’re either the taxpayers’ collective desire to stem earth-killing excess or the Super Civic or both. We’re here to help you. We’re the government. We’re either the taxpayers’ collective desire to stem earth-killing excess or the Super Civic or both. We’re here to help you. We’re the government. We’re either the taxpayers’ collective desire to stem earth-killing excess or the Super Civic or both. We’re here to help you. We’re the government. 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I was taught by one of my cultural teachers, Mr. Hillman, to say hello to the Upper Skagit people, that among the Puget Salish tribes of the Pacific Northwest and the local Native American tribes, that face problems of loss and displacement and that, despite the difficulties, we speak to you from a place somewhere in the middle between two very different worlds.

It is important to consider how a culture defines value-based concepts like the good life or a good person or the meaning of life. There is no universal definition that applies to all people. For example, a few years ago I heard some Masai men from Kenya speaking at a gathering in North Seattle during a trip they had made to visit the United States and Canada. They were dressed in their traditional clothing and despite the frigid winter weather outside, they were wearing simple woven toga-like coverings under their jackets and sandals with no socks. They explained that since they are mountain people they found their weather similar to their home.

They were asked, “What do you find most curious about American culture?” They looked at each other and smiled, obviously having asked themselves the same question.

One of them responded by pulling a dollar bill from his coat pocket. He said, “We find it strange that you have to use money to buy things. We believe that home is where the heart is.” He waved the money in front of the audience. “You think this is wealth. We believe wealth is children and cattle.”

Another more local example is the potlatch, a ceremony conducted by coast Northwest tribes from Alaska to the Puget Sound. The potlatch serves a number of purposes within these cultures, including announcing important events like a marriage or inheritance, with the host paying those in attendance with gifts to remember the announcement. It also allows a redistribution of wealth and prestige to give away all of their possessions. There is a S’Klallam song sung as the guests leave the potlatch house that translates to, “I know how to give everything away.” Wealth is not to be accumulated by the individual and kept for him or herself; it is to be shared and given freely among the people.

In his book, Allmother: Tribal Wisdom in a Modern World, the author David MacPhayrane Loan presents his findings and observations about how we look at our individual cultures and how our culture and our city matters have had on traditional cultures; one important critique he makes is that cities, by their very nature, destroy them. The things that make cultures function are the things that tear tribal cultures apart. The individual is more important than the group. Competition supersedes cooperation. Material wealth over social balance. He looked everything down to a simple universal observation in tribal cultures, people are more important than things; in civilized cultures, things are more important than people. As we watch some members of Congress propose to eliminate programs that serve ouruwel —poor children, mothers and the homeless—all for the sake of a balanced budget, we must ask ourselves what our culture values. Money over people?

With all of the above in mind, I asked several local Native people from different tribal groups their thoughts on what makes a good life. I did not share my thoughts in asking the question, so I wanted to hear their philosophy and idea independent from my own.

They were as follows:

When I have a job that allows me to be with my family. One that doesn’t take me away from them. That is a good life.

I once had a good life, but only wanted it so my family could do something together. Kids being kids, they tried it eventually. I just put a sheet of plywood over it and covered it with a blanket. It became another table in our house.”

Toby Joseph
Apache/Southern Ute filmmaker

“My good life is enjoying my children. Raising them and watching them grow. It is a challenge to raise children in the best way possible.

I also think it is finding beauty and fun in the small things. Things that bring you joy in your own little way. And not learning to want things unnecessary to your life.”

Robert Fire
Tahltan human rights advocate

“Tribal wisdom: This is a good life. Being happy with who you are. I’m still learning. Everyday is looking for a home and the good life when you’re looking for your home. The society we live in tells us all the heartache. It teaches you to want more and not be happy as you are.”

Luke Black Elk
Gwich’in, Lakota

In hearing the thoughts, beliefs, and philosophies of these and other Native people, I find my own ideas about the good life reinforced. People, especially family, are more important than material wealth and personal satisfaction. If my family and people are happy, then I am happy.

Of course this is what most people, Native and non-Native, might say. Family is important, but we now live in a time when civilized culture demands we sacrifice our human connections for the good of this culture and its economy. iPhone, iPad, Myspace—all speak to the individual isolated and disconnected from family and community. Are we easier to control when we are disconnected?

It is a struggle these days to be a human being. Do we modern folk talk lives of quiet desperation? I remember a line from an English writer that said, “Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle”. These sentiments seem to be from a human being who recognizes the struggle we face as we try to make sense of a relatively new social order called civilization. I am simply hoping that as civilizations continue to develop, they can remember what it means to be human, forgetting that into their social fabric to the point where people become more important than things.

Another one of my teachers, the late suicider, Bruce Miller of the Skokomish people, told me, “It’s very simple. Go out and lift people up. Tell them how good they are, how important they are to their people, how much we appreciate them. Prase them and lift them how much we need them. If you can do this, you have done enough.”

So my take on the good life is that it must involve others. And since I am an artist and storyteller in the service of my people, then I’d say a good life I do work that I believe is beneficial to my culture as a whole and might keep it alive for our descendants. For as surely as I am connected to my ancestors, I am connected to the one who will be.

Robert Fire is a member of the Lower Elwha Klallam Nation, a Native artist, storyteller and educator. He works in a variety of mediums including painting, drawing, printmaking and sculpture, and he has been active in a variety of environmental, educational and human rights organizations. He is a member of the American Indian Studies from the Evergreen State College.

Photo: Roger Fernandes

THE GOOD LIFE
A NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE
Roger Fernandes
When I first visited the Duwamish River, I was immediately struck by the raw industrial environment. I grew up in the middle of the river in a slape, and as we paddled past rusty pipes, degrading bil-coated water, we hugged perched on an abandoned barge and small pocke of native grasses and shrubs defiled asphalt parking lots, all under the golden, regal shoulders of Mount Rainier. Where was I? How I had not realized that Seattle was a river flowing north into Elliott Bay that also contained a massive Superfund site just south of downtown? It was the summer of 2000, and the EPA had recently declared the lower Duwamish River one of America’s most toxic areas and one particularly close to where people live and worked—and completely out of sight of most Seattle citizens.

In 2003, I began my Masters at Antioch University, Seattle in the Whole Systems Design program. The fusion of systems theory and sustainable social change brought my eye when volunteering in environmental education, arts, small business promotion, live music production and a desire to make a difference together at last. With the collaborative nurturing of my advisor, Dr. Farouk Seif, an architect of Egyptian descent, educator and artist with a passion for design communica, wholeness and semiology, I found a powerful and powerful method in the design approach he taught. Client and designer can move in a dance to achieve mutual outcomes, whether creating a house or organizing a grassroots community campaign. This type of design approach allows for desires to flow from client to designer and back again.

In the case of the Duwamish River Superfund site, for which I dedicated my Antioch education and ultimately created a thesis project in the community, the clients were the people who lived along the river, volunteers, artists, history buffs and cyclic diving to cruise the industrial streets, dedicated citizens who attended every community meeting and many others who didn’t have the time or inclination to do so. I sought out the motivated, those who also saw beauty in the rusty barges swinging trees and quietly watched Harbor Seals plying the river. I found a common work ethic in the restoration ecoligists, who worked tirelessly to breathe life back into the river through, creating a “living of green paved” along the Duwamish, and with crusaders like John Beal, who devoted his life to restoring the river.

When it comes to the good life in the future, we each have other, we have knowledge and we have a lot of empty spaces that we can either claim or see claimed for us. By choosing to transform this common-ground, we have the opportunity to plant the seeds of change.

Shouldn’t everyone afford and have access to healthy, nutritious food? Access to our existing paradigm, one’s ability to access fresh fruits and vegetables depends on class status.

What we do with our empty spaces says much about what we value as a community. Some communities build high-rise condominiums, some build fancy beachfront resorts, others build playgrounds. The problem lies in the extent to which communities are involved in the clearing of their empty spaces or if others do the claiming for them. It seems like too often a community has very little say in how its vacant spaces are occupied. Gentriications comes to mind.

At Alleycat Acres, we plant seeds in empty spaces because it’s a way to reclaim and place space back into the hands of its rightful owners. These small, vacant lots turned urban farms serve as places for people in the city to recon-nect with food, each other and the land. Our farms are 100 percent volunteer-run, where people from all walks of life, alongside one another to redefine urban living in a space that may have otherwise never existed. Combined within these farms is a story about the complicated relationship between people, community and food. It is a story about not only re-energizing the cityscapes, but also, how food is a binding force between us, regardless of where we live.

When we first began to clear space for an urban farm in Beacon Hill, we were eager to get community members involved. People walking by would ask who we were and what we were doing, but we were unable to reach out in a direct, inten-tional way. During our work parties, groups would go door-to-door introducing Alleycat Acres and inviting the community to volunteer. During one of our summer evening work parties, a thirteen-year-old boy named Aaron, who lived in the apartment building next to our Beacon Hill farm, came over and asked if he could help. He said he had gotten into trouble at school, and his mom sent him over to work for us as punishment. Although we did not exactly support the idea of turning punishment, we enthusiastically welcomed him.

Alan was one of the last volunteers to leave that evening, and he came back on his own every week for the rest of the summer. He helped with every aspect of the farm, from planting to harvest. He was always eager to learn and supported less experienced volunteers. At the end of the summer, Alan’s mom told us he had a great time as a “founding volunteer.”

When it comes to the design process, one’s ability to access fresh fruits and vegetables in the United States and globally, community food systems is a story about the complicated relationship between people, community and food. Reclaimed spaces can be transformative. When it comes to the good life in the future, we each have other, we have knowledge and we have a lot of empty spaces that we can either claim or see claimed for us. By choosing to transform this common-ground, we have the opportunity to plant the seeds of change.
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of the elements are clear, however. A biophilic remains an important subject for discussion. Some humans and an essential quality of urban life. Wilson defines the term as “the innately emotional take into account our growing appreciation of the neighborhood concept; I believe we should better to slow and calm the automobile. I would like to and activities, the pedestrian scale, and the attempt to populate an elementary school), the mixing of uses that experience of living is the most vital and visceral.

What a biophilic neighborhood looks like

I review Perry’s idea in the introduction to the Regional Plan for New York City, many of us in planning history. What makes Perry’s vision appealing is the idea that instead of recognizing the place and its embeddedness in the natural world, and that is a promising development, indeed.

One of the landmark ideas in planning history is Clarence Perry’s Neighborhood Concept. Exemplified most fully in a monograph included in the 1930 Regional Plan for New York City, many of us in the planning profession have largely internalized the key idea: that the neighborhood has a compelling scale and the essential DNA building blocks of the contemporary city, and in many respects, is where the essence of living is the most vital and visceral.

I review Perry’s idea in the introduction to the Planning course of teaching the resident female instead. I learned a lot about how the canyon served to bring together different parts of the neighborhood. Those living in biophilic neighborhoods may increasingly need to find creative ways to coexist with other animals. Effective strategies for co-existence are being pioneered in cities like Vancouver, including a program run by the Stanley Park Ecological Society called Connecting With Creatures (CWC), which, for example, teaches residents through online instructions how to make noisemakers to keep coyotes at a safe distance.

As our nation continue to age, elders will need to play an increasingly important role in becoming unofficial neighborhood place docents or nature coaches, adding valuable meaning of more pleasant to their lives while improving an ecological consciousness to the next generation. We might wonder how practical or realistic it is to imagine urbanites living in closer contact with the natural world, residing in places with the physical conditions and biomes of urban biophilic neighborhoods. But the older living of the mortgage crisis and the economic downturn is that many households and families are profoundly re-thinking their lives and urban commitments. A shift is under way in how the home is perceived—from thinking about owning the needs of the house to a sense of what might make the house more livable, enjoyable and meaningful. These shifting attitudes suggest the potential for a greater regard about, and involved in, the urban natural world, and that is a promising development, indeed.

The Snoqualmie Valley introduces itself with a rear to its spectacular 3700-foot-high walls, but then winds peacefully 43 miles north through flat farm-borders between fir-covered ridges. Residents, foresters and officials are working out a new way of life here, forging a new relationship with nature while living within—living with the rigorous categories of pure preservation versus unrestrained urban growth. As (preformed research for my book, The Agile City, (Island Press, 2010).)

The county, it seems, must choose between farmers and salmon. It is trying to have both.

I am reminded of the day I spent in one of San Diego’s newest and incredibly beautiful canyon, Rose Canyon, with two friends and urban trackers. Over the course of teaching the resident female instead, I learned a lot about how the canyon served to bring together different parts of the neighborhood. Those living in biophilic neighborhoods may increasingly need to find creative ways to coexist with other animals. Effective strategies for co-existence are being pioneered in cities like Vancouver, including a program run by the Stanley Park Ecological Society called Connecting With Creatures (CWC), which, for example, teaches residents through online instructions how to make noisemakers to keep coyotes at a safe distance.

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A biophilic neighborhood in one where nature is close at hand, where there are trees, gardens, streams and other growing life just outside one’s door, which are in turn connected to larger, more expansive networks of green spaces and addresses. Increasingly, we speak of the need for gardens that foster and accommodate free-range life-ways; ideally, we create sufficient opportunities for children to play in nature, rather than more conventional playground structures. Pedestrian connections shape infrastructures and urban neighborhoods that allow both children and adults to walk out the front door and move from smaller to progressively larger natural areas encourages physical exercise, place-learning and provides links with important independent in an American landscape so dependent on human-car facilitation. My Australian colleague Peter Newman says we must eat the bar ever higher, designing cities for few kids.

Biophilic neighborhoods and places will make us more resilient as a society. For me, this is partly a project of making the ways in which we understand community wealth. We are apt to think of our community assets in the usual, narrow way (property values, built infrastructure, etc.). An expanded understanding of community wealth includes, for example, histories and social patterns, the abundance of time in a community’s life, influence, history and culture, the presence of Elders and the young together in the same urban spaces and foodsheds.
The words “the good life” frame a spectrum loaded with moral judgment and extremity—a spectrum of only black and white. Thomas Jefferson, with his belief in the morally uplifting qualities of rural life, has given us a deeply embedded tradition of “rural,” which springs fully formed from dense urban living. A city will destroy anything good or moral.

Nothing like good food draws people, and with food comes the demand for well-designed, generous pedestrian territory. Food is a source of pleasure. Bring food and the demand for well-designed, generous pedestrian territory. With food comes chairs and nothing like good food draws people, and with food comes the demand for well-designed, generous pedestrian territory. The rich fabric of her storytelling included instruction in the tangible textures and feel of the few textures still intact. She lectured on ancestral instruction in the tangible texture and feel of the fade.

Healthy Street Life
Seattle’s Peter Miller of Peter Miller Books believes places should be perceived as a taking space that is not theirs. Seattle’s Peter Miller of Peter Miller Books believes places should be perceived as a taking space that is not theirs. The transition is sometimes awkward between private and public realms. While not brilliant design, these humanize the street, making citizens feel welcome and safe. These generous gestures illustrate the values and aspirations of a brand in a place.

Art Made Public
Starbucks customers value sustainability. Art made public, both fixed and ephemeral, is an extension generating what the corporate world calls “Branded Environment.” Art made public, both fixed and ephemeral, is an extension generating what the corporate world calls “Branded Environment.” Art made public, both fixed and ephemeral, is an extension generating what the corporate world calls “Branded Environment.” Art made public, both fixed and ephemeral, is an extension generating what the corporate world calls “Branded Environment.”

I was born lucky. With a tarnished silver spoon, a doting grandmother fed me a romanticized heritage of the American Northwest that still shapes who I am today. Take of timber and shipping, the Victorian mansion that housed our civic-minded family, a towering clan of Port Townsend, Washington. Though wildly successful to point, my people lost everything in the Great Depression except their pride and family love, heirloom treasures and the faded glory of “the good life” once envied.

I started the project by comparing how Starbucks customers experience public space to the way they inhabited these same spaces in the pre-laptop age. Most customers, I found, come to think of Starbucks as “a third place,” an alternative to the home and office that has elements of both spaces. My design team found that community groups use the stores the way their parents might have used neighborhood church halls. Business people gather for off-site, after-hours meetings. Moms with strollers come in the mornings. Students come, too. Today, there’s a student study hall laptop-laden in nearly every location. Starbucks customers value sustainability, so we elected to have all new stores LEED certified. And the momentum to the coffee shop is such an important part of everyday life for so many people, we build bridges between the store design and their neighborhood settings.

In most Starbucks-usued corporations, commercial design follows the dictates of market analysis. My team took a broader approach. We looked at variations of commercial seating, room layouts and furniture proximity in coffee and tea houses in Europe, Australia and Asia. We gathered inspiration for texture, scale and experience. We riffed on study halls, pubs and bars—living rooms and dens. In 2008–2010 he was Senior Vice President of Global Design for Starbucks Coffee.

Design can bring us closer to our roots, both romanticized and abstract, tangible and concrete:

Art Meets Place
Every Saturday morning, a round, bold-faced man in a white shirt stands at the intersection of Madison Lane and Kearney in San Francisco and with arms wide open, sings at the top of his voice in Italian. He has found an acoustic sweet spot and has appropriated the street. Art made public, both fixed and ephemeral, is an indicator of a rich life. The integration of the arts changes the nature of a city, shifting it from a place of work to a place of living and being.

This fear is embedded in our public policy, manifest in the design and use of our streets and public realm in the rigorous repressiveness of public and private life. This fear may have been vell centenial ago, but today the fear of rich, serious urban life effaces the rationalization and the success of which are extraordinary resources. Densification addresses climate change, Edward Glaeser’s work documents the power of cities as incubators for innovation, creativity and sources of economic power. Both are reason enough to uproot the Jeffersonian view. Densification addresses climate change, Edward Glaeser’s work documents the power of cities as incubators for innovation, creativity and sources of economic power. Both are reason enough to uproot the Jeffersonian view.

The city is a place ofopportunity, a place of invention, attracting the best and the brightest, then they must be interesting and a source of pleasure. In this equation, the arts bring much more to the table than a small increase in economic power. Both are reason enough to uproot the Jeffersonian view.

Cities are to be places of innovation, attracting the best and the brightest, then they must be interesting and a source of pleasure.
MINIMAL LIVING

Ken Tadashi Oshima

A house, I think, is but a temporary abode, but how delightful it is to find one that has harmonious proportions and a pleasant atmosphere... A house, though it may not be in the current fashion or elaborately decorated will appeal to us by its unaffecting beauty—a grace of those with an inalienable aspect like a garden where plants, growing of their own accord, have a special charm... And I have noticed that self-addressed letters kept clean (not even a bit of dirt) the place an air of having been lived in. A house which multitudes of workmen have polished with every care, where strange and rare Chinese and Japanese furnishings are displayed, and even the grasses and trees of the garden have been trained unnaturally, is ugly to look at and most depressing. How could anyone live for long in such a place? The most casual glance will suggest how likely such a house is to turn in a moment to smoke.

Today the musings of this medieval monk on the virtues of the minimal dwelling in harmony with the natural environment are surprisingly relevant. His praise of unaffecting beauty over elaboration and strange excesses seem to be a direct critique of our modern-day McMansions, akin to the elaborate houses scorned by Yoshida, have come to be tarred properly with the brush of the real estate bubble. Gone is the fascination with the burst of the real estate bubble. Gone is the minimal hut, which is subjective to individuals, cultures and environments change over time. Yet they all beg the question: Does bigger is better?

The minimal kitchen can be counterpoised by the culinary delights of the city. Many people, nonetheless, worry about feeling claustrophobic in such minimal dwellings. Indeed, there is a fine line between being cozy or constricted, which is subjective to individuals, cultures and contexts. For Kamo no Chōomei, the hut in the country was brought to life by natural phenomena—including the sounds of a cuckoo in the summer and evening insects in the autumn. For the urban dweller, the minimal dwelling can be seen as relieved by expanding into the living room of the city...whether it is a café, library or museum. The tiny refrigerator encourages daily shopping to keep items fresh, and the minimal kitchen can be counterpoised by the culinary delights of the city.

In a modern economy driven by consumption, maintaining the ideal of the minimal dwelling is a constant challenge. Nonetheless, this can mean striving for basic ideals of quality over quantity rather than bigger is better. The minimal dwelling, which could be seen as a fundamental resistance unit, mediates human lives within both the natural and urban environment. Perceptions and forms of living environments change over time. Yet they all beg almost primal questions of sustaining living within the cycles of the day, seasons and years whereby a “ten-foot square hut” may indeed more intensely engage human habitats in the present, as well as in the past and future.
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When: Thursday, June 9, 2011
Where: Rejuvenation, 2910 1st Ave S
Time: 5:30-7:30

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Is it possible to say that maple syrup has a particular terroir? Yes, if we translate the French concept of terroir to the English phrase “taste of place.” In Vermont, this concept captures what we consider defining elements of our state’s food systems, farming communities, strong rural agrarian and culinary traditions, and the belief that it does matter where your food comes from. Tasting to place assures that food and drink reflect the natural environment and its interaction with human craftsmanship and cultural practices. This all begins at the intersection of physiological and cultural tastes. Judging the sensory quality of any food or drink is complex. All human beings share certain physiological aspects of taste. However, taste remains profoundly subjective because, perhaps even more so than with senses such as hearing and sight, taste experiences are simultaneously shared and not-shared. The body (or at least the mouth, nose and brain) always mediates between food and drink as an external social-object and an internal sensory subject. Once food or drink enters the body, any social engagement becomes the sensation of an individual. Sensing taste also requires talking tastes; sharing this particular sensory experience requires translating it to language, a shared dialogue with others.

The complexity of creating an aesthetics of taste, therefore, lies in how discussions develop and what values and beliefs shape both conversations and final sensory evaluations. Describing the taste of maple syrup is difficult, especially these days, when we are endlessly pursued by sweet flavors found in almost every processed and packaged food. In an interview, longtime sugar maker Francon Howrigan said, “I’d have to stress the maple flavor [has] a lot of body to it. It’s same as anything. People taste today or eat today, but do they taste? You put the syrup in your mouth and you swallow it. You should have a good, honest maple syrup afterwards.” Sugar makers know that not every batch of maple syrup will taste the same, what can we expect from a truly wild food? Much of the joy of pairings of the sugaring season revolves around just what sort of syrup emerges after the sap has been harvested and then boiled down to a viscous liquid. Every year brings new surprises.

Lighter syrups can taste like vanilla or evoke the smells of maple leaves that have fallen on the forest floor. Meanwhile, the maple flavor of darker syrups, depending on many possibilities on the location of a sugarbush and the amount of time the sap takes to boil down into syrup can taste woodier and earthier, with even a hint of mushroom. More than a century ago, the naturalist John Burroughs said, “[maple syrup] has a wild delicacy of flavor that no other sweet can match. What you smell in freshly cut maple-wood, or taste in the blossom of the tree, is to it. It is rather, the distilled essence of the tree.” Soil, tree, slopes and weather all make a difference in the taste of maple syrup. A constant conversation between people about sensory judgments in light of nature’s bounty can map many rich narratives new aesthetic values and new relationships to the natural landscape. In Vermont, this conversation now involves sugar makers, the people in the fields, the people in the woods, the people at the University of Vermont, policymakers from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and others. We keep smelling, sipping, swallowing and talking, always learning more about the unique tastes of Vermont’s working landscapes.

Amy Trubek is an assistant professor in the Nutrition and Food Science Department at the University of Vermont. She is involved in ongoing research on the importance of the taste of place in a review of promoting and supporting place-based foods and regional food systems, (see recent book, The Taste of Place, A Journey into Terroir). looks at the long-term importance of terroir as a cultural category in France and explores how it is being used in the United States today in creating our food culture.
thinking

Drawing

Discovering

Knowing

Michael Merrill

and the Patient Search for Architecture

Michael Merrill


A friend and I made an architectural tour of the City of Brotherly Love. On our list was a pilgrimage to the Louis Kahn archives at the University of Pennsylvania. Unlike the Liberty Bell, the archive turned out to be a rarefied, reserved,-only setup and access was firmly denied. Undaunted, we slushed through the door during a momentary distraction and rummaged on some kind of massive organization. Thousands of drawings were scattered in piles on the floor, and we pounced on the stacks of oversized tracing paper covered in smudged black pencil and charcoal like pixies with burly torsos. And, like the Mona Lisa or any icon never seen in the flesh, the drawings’ physical reality was at once more powerful and more ordinary than imagined. They had incred- ible physical beauty but were oddly-similar (in form not content) to drawings on so many architects’ desks. This was both disturbing and reassuring— here was the handwork of an honest-to-goodness genius, yet it was so close to how we all worked—same pencils, same paper, same process, same struggle (though certainly not the same concerns!).

Michael Merril, a practicing architect, historian and a very good writer, brings this same sense of wonder, joy and discovery to life in a pair of prescriptive companion books published by Lars Müller. He invites us to view the great complexity that is the universe of Kahn’s work through the lens of a single unbuilt project—the Dominican Motherhouse—a unusual and risky approach. Merrill describes this investigation as a “culture of drawing” distinct from a purely historical approach, and it could only have been conceived by a practicing architect who weeps with the peculiar split nature of architectural theory as an abstract historical “text” that remains incalculably further from the physical act of making. Merrill calls this his “drawing-based bias” towards theory, an attitude appropriate for students of architecture or anyone who practices more than they theorize. For these drawings are not mere expressions in and of themselves (though many of today’s archi- tects subvert this) but records of seeking, thinking and translating thought into the physical realm. Merrill describes this investigation as a “culture of making” distinct from a purely historical approach, while Kahn himself talked about it as making the “thoughtful making” distinct from a purely historical approach, while Kahn himself talked about thinking from week to week over a three-year period, accompanied by Merrill’s fluid narra- tive, illuminating design nuances, and opening up of new important lines of inquiry. Of course, one reason for the book’s success is that, promi- nent within the pantheon of great unbuilt buildings (Beaulieu’s Library, Terra’s Danum, Kahn’s Salk Meeting House, anything by Hadid, etc.) stands this project of Kahn’s. Pragmatically, the Motherhouse is an integrated ensemble of build- ings and landscapes for a congregation of Domin- ican sisters nestled into a wooded property in rural Pennsylvania. Historically, it represents a singular position both in Kahn’s personal exploration of meaning and form and within the larger narrative of modern architecture.

The two books are superb companions— I recom- mend going ahead and buying both—and credit needs to go Lars Müller for the accompanying to the consider- able expense of publishing two volumes when one might have seemed sufficient. Each format shows off the strength of its respective content. The illus- trated portion is neatly packaged into an appropri- ate-sized paperback, with smaller illustrations illuminating the text. Freed from these constraints, the second book is a functional visual documentation of Kahn’s drawings lovingly and richly reproduced on thick, coated paper. This volume also has a concise accompanying commentary meant perhaps for those who-
As much as I have always imagined myself as a spontaneous and adventurous guy, the older I get the more set in my ways I am. I’ve traveled the world, I’ve run with the bulls, I’ve been on mountaintops, I have a termos and smelling for God’s sake, but I also haven’t changed my breakfast cereal in 15 years. This stagnation can be particularly difficult during a worldwide recession. Like so many of our AIA/GA readers, I found myself recently in the throes of a career change, and it affected me more than I anticipated. Since my Side Yard installments are typically semi-autobiographical cathartic excises, I felt I owed it to myself to share this with you.

To start out, I’ve had a pretty unique architectural career in that I had been a “company man” in my prior firm for close to 25 years—almost half my life! I mean, I still had notes in files that were written on typewriters using carbon paper. When I began considering a career change, I felt like a divorcee tumultuously jumping into the dating scene after decades of marriage. There was this nagging sentiment that this was going to make me unemployable in the job market looking for live in a gay summer camp. Who would possibly be interested in me now, at my frumpy age, in this economic wasteland, especially after all the things I’ve written about others in this column?

It became quickly apparent that “firm courting” norms had changed dramatically and Ron van der Veen, wearing his proverbial leisure suit, was behind the times. Simple questions like what to wear (tie or no tie?), how much to talk, what to order for lunch so things wouldn’t stick to my teeth in shock that my white athletic tube socks were looked down towards my crossed legs noticing in my prior firm for close to 23 years—almost half of this (because of my modesty), will it effectively remove the value of my resume by 75 percent? Thank God that most firms don’t expect an architect my age to have a fancy, super-graphic portfolio. This was the part on which I actually spent the least amount of effort. But the last time I actually carried around a portfolio, it was in a big, heavy binder. This time I had to keep checking my pocket every five minutes to make sure my flash drive hadn’t fallen out.

During my early firm courting, I was kidded with doubt about myself and about leaving my previous employer. I had reoccurring nightmares that I crawled back to my old firm, asking for my job back with most of my colleagues not remembering my name. I never really got over the bad dreams and the “dining for the first time in decades” feeling, but I did learn to wear black socks and order food that wouldn’t compromise my teeth.

Eventually things worked out better than expected. After quickly adjusting to the modern courting scene, I am happy to say that I was very lucky to find a great new girlfriend! And yes, having a new career has been exhilarating—kind of like a prom date with a cheerleader. But it has become apparent to me that the courtesies doesn’t end when one walks through the door. The toughest part of this transition has been pretending to be compete- tent and concentrating for long stretches of time. It’s exhausting! And I figure it is only a matter of time before my new girlfriend realizes my gouting out the window isn’t as much about unimprovement reflection as it is trying to figure out what to write for my next Side Yard installment.

Ron van der Veen
The economic downturn has hit my architecture business rather hard. For years, decades actually, I had a running list of clients waiting for me to design their projects. Now the backlog is gone. I have large blocks of unscheduled time. I came to realize the value of my work and was content with the size of the practice, unassuming successes, and a steady income. Now the practice is suddenly gone. A few days later, Gehry had to cut his staff of fifty down to three. He called the experience “using the devil” and said it was neither the first nor the last time it happened. However, that moment was a turning point at which he committed his attention to design work that aroused his passion. He is now one of the most notable and celebrated architects in the world, having fundamentally redefined building form.

For years, Gehry was the poster child for the new architecture: innovative, unencumbered, and driven by passion. His projects were often stunning, but his practice was not. He had admitted to not really liking the projects he was designing. The two parted ways amicably, and the work was completed. Gehry became available to use his gifts in new and more meaningful ways. Many now claim their design practices to be sustainable. Gehry acknowledged his sense of loss and disappointment. He spoke from the heart. He stopped what he was doing, took the hit and remained present. Then he became available to use his gifts in new and more meaningful ways.

Many now claim their design practices to be focused on sustainability. I’m not convinced, however, that specifying bamboo floors and solar arrays is enough to deserve that moniker if the underlying business paradigm requires constant production. Perhaps design itself would be more sustainable if it allowed, or encouraged, pauses in the economic cycle. They are natural inflection points. For some the consequences can be as valuable as doing. There is regenerative opportunity in stillness.

The stillness has within it another kind of wealth—one of reflection, grounding and opportunity. I have come to appreciate the fallow period.

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